



Infant and Toddler Program Handbook

WELCOME

The GeoKids Infant and Toddler Program serves children 3 months to 30 months. Our program is informed by the comprehensive research and training for best practices provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); the standards set by the General Services Administration (GSA) Childcare Division; and the requirements of California state licensing. The program has also incorporated elements recommended by GeoKids staff and parents over the years it has been in operation.

ABOUT THE MOONSTONE ROOM

Babies learn about the world through their senses and through bodily motor activities: they are born seeking information about their world. GeoKids teachers facilitate learning through attentive, affectionate and respectful care.

Upon enrollment into the Moonstone Room, parents and teachers will complete an Infant Needs and Service Plan regarding eating, sleeping and play activities so that we can provide a consistent routine for your baby at GeoKids. As your child grows and changes, please meet with a teacher to update the written plan.

Each day you will complete a brief “daily report” with information about how your infant slept, what he has eaten, etc. Teachers will use the same form to record information about your child’s day. When dropping off your child, please allow yourself enough time to fill out the report and to change your child’s diaper if necessary. You must sign in your child each day using your first initial and full last name and a phone number; noting your anticipated pick-up time helps teachers plan for naps and bottles. You must similarly sign your child out at the end of the day.

We believe that each infant has his or her own schedule. Teachers will use the Infant Needs and Services plan, the information on the daily report, and cues from the child to provide time for napping, eating, diapering, quiet play, active play and outside time each day.

Please remember that for the safety of the infants, only adults are allowed in the room. Siblings and other young guests may wait in our lobby or outside the classroom doorway.

Shoe-Free Environment for the Infant Room

We practice a shoe-free policy in this room. Please remove shoes or slip on a pair of shoe covers before entering the infant room. Shoe covers are provided in the basket outside the room. The infants spend much of their time exploring on the floor, so we keep these areas as clean as possible.

GEOKIDS MODEL OF INFANT CARE

Initial Primary Care

Primary Care means that one teacher will initially have primary responsibility for your infant's care. When the same person feeds, diapers and helps with the naptime routine, the infant can build trust with that caregiver and can begin to anticipate what will happen and how. This practice also gives parents an initial connection in the Moonstone Room while they, too, establish trust and adjust to their new routine at GeoKids.

However, primary caregiving is not exclusive caregiving: the caregivers work together as a team, and it is important that children and parents become comfortable with all the teachers in the room. The child should not be totally dependent on the presence of one person in order to have a good day. The realities of group care mean that another caregiver might step in to provide care as necessary.

Moving Beyond Primary Care

Having a secure base is very important to the youngest children, and primary caregiving enables them to know who will know their unique way of communicating and who will be especially attentive to them. After this base has been established and infants become comfortable in their environment, they are encouraged to develop warm and trusting relationships with other adults. Caregivers remind them that they are still safe when being cared for by another caregiver.

Islanding

"Islanding" refers to the practice of having an adult sit on the floor and remain basically in the same place while the children move around him/her. In this way, the adult is at the child's level and is available to engage in meaningful activities with the children. It creates a calm and more settled atmosphere in the room, and the adult becomes a point of reference and reassurance when children are exploring or attempting something new.

ABOUT THE ONYX ROOM

In the Onyx Room, children have the freedom to make choices in a safe and stimulating environment that has been designed to meet their developmental needs. Encouraging self-help skills and supporting decision-making abilities supports the autonomy that is so important at this stage in their development.

Parents and teachers will complete a Toddler Needs and Services Plan for the youngest toddlers. For older toddlers, a written plan is not required. Please label all of your child's items (shoes, jackets, sippy cups, extra clothes, etc.) with his/her name.

Your child's teachers will watch your child for signs of readiness for toilet learning. Some of these signs include staying dry for long periods of time, asking to have their diaper changed and interest in other children who are using the toilet. If the caregiver sees these signs over a period of time, parents will be contacted to discuss the toilet learning process. A plan will be developed that meets the mutual needs of the child, parent and the program. Frequent communication between parents and caregivers is very important during this process!

CURRICULUM FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

We believe strongly in the essential value of play in the lives of young children, and our program is play-based at all age levels. Play is the child's primary medium for exploration and learning. Through play, infants and toddlers develop the vital connections with which developing brains organize perceptions and experiences.

The curriculum for the infants and toddlers involves everything that happens throughout the day. Everything that a child experiences is a learning opportunity: diaper changes, snack time, taking off shoes – all of these daily experiences are opportunities for children to learn about themselves and their world.

Teachers also plan and organize the environment to provide experiences which support:

- motor development – reaching, grasping, crawling in and out, throwing, pulling;
- cognitive development – object permanence, cause and effect experiences, language, listening and responding to sounds and voices, and problem solving;
- social and emotional development – playing among others, positive peer interactions, and expressing emotions towards others.

When teachers organize materials for the room, they take into account their knowledge of child development along with children's individual differences. Teachers observe the children's interests, their developing skills, and their reactions to materials and build the curriculum based on these observations. As the children grow and change, the teachers change the classroom environment. A classroom may look very different at the end of a year than it did at the beginning!

We give infants and toddlers many opportunities and sufficient time to thoroughly explore the qualities of varied materials, such as paint, playdough, water, sand, bubbles, paper, fabric, markers, glue, tape, string. Music and movement are also part of the curriculum, through singing, dancing, and lots of outdoor gross motor experiences.

MEAL TIME FOR INFANTS

Young infants will be fed according to their own schedule. As they grow and start eating more varied foods, their eating needs will change and the eating times will be adjusted toward the group schedule.

Early relationships between an infant and caregivers involving feeding set the stage for an infant to develop eating patterns for life. Caregivers are patient, sensitive, and reassuring by responding appropriately to each individual infant's feeding cues, such as opening the mouth, making suckling sounds, and moving the hands at random. Waiting for an infant to cry to indicate hunger is not necessary or desirable; each infant has his/her own cues, which may vary widely.

If your child has a food allergy or intolerance, please notify the teachers immediately. A doctor's note must be provided stating exactly what foods cannot be given to your child, to help teachers distinguish between allergies, intolerances, and family preferences.

Infant Food Preparation

We suggest that parents bring a minimum of four bottles per day. We require that all infant bottles be prepared at home. All parts of the bottle must be labeled with the child's name: bottle, rim, nipple, and cover. The bottle itself should also be labeled daily with the date. It is also important to indicate on a label if the bottle contains breast milk. We encourage parents who are breast-feeding to keep a pouch of frozen breast milk, labeled with the date, in our freezer. We suggest that each child have an unopened ready-to-feed can of formula kept at the center in the event that we do not have enough formula on a given day.

All jars of baby food must also be marked with your child's name. Please mark the jar as well as the cover. Please keep some extra food (puffs, crackers, baby food jars) marked with your child's name in the cabinet.

General Plan for Feeding Infants

When bottle feeding, caregivers either hold infants or feed them sitting up. Infants who are unable to sit are always held for bottle-feeding. We will not permit infants to have bottles in the crib or to carry bottles or sippy cups with them during the day. Staff will not bottle-feed more than one infant at a time. We do not use high chairs for feeding infants.

GeoKids staff, in consultation with parents, will offer children fluids from a cup as soon as they are developmentally ready. Some children may be able to drink from a sippy cup as early as 5 months of age, while for others it is much later. Weaning a child to drink from a cup is an individual process which occurs over a wide range of time. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends weaning from bottles by the child's first birthday.

We will not serve formula mixed with cereal, fruit juice, or any other foods in a bottle unless the child's health care provider supplies written documentation that the child has a medical reason for this type of feeding. The same applies to fruit juice or water mixed with fruit juice.

GeoKids staff will not serve any cow's milk to infants from birth to 12 months of age and will serve only whole, pasteurized milk to children between 12 and 24 months of age who are not on formula or breast milk. GeoKids will not serve skim milk, reconstituted nonfat dry milk, or milk containing 1% or 2% butterfat to any child between 12 and 24 months of age, except with the written direction of a parent and the child's health care provider.

Breast Milk Feeding

GeoKids supports feeding breast milk to infants. Breastfeeding mothers are welcome to come throughout the day to breast-feed.

Expressed breast milk brought to GeoKids in bottles must be properly labeled with the infant's name and the date. The bottle must immediately be stored in the refrigerator upon arrival. Breast milk will be discarded if:

- it is in an unsanitary bottle;
- it has been stored in the refrigerator for 24 hours or more; or in the freezer for three months or more.
- it has been un-refrigerated for an hour or more
- A bottle of breast milk has been fed over a period that exceeds an hour

Frozen breast milk is thawed under running cold water or in the refrigerator.

Warming Bottles And Infant Foods

Bottles are warmed under running warm tap water or by placing them in a container of water that is no warmer than 120 degrees F. Bottles are not to be warmed in a microwave oven. After warming, bottles are mixed gently and the temperature of the milk tested before feeding.

Infant foods are transferred to a clean dish to be warmed in a microwave oven, then stirred and tested for temperature. A caregiver is not to hold an infant while removing a bottle or infant food from the container of warm water or while preparing a bottle or stirring infant food that has been warmed in some other way.

When a crock pot is used for warming bottles or infant food, it must be out of children's reach, contain water at a temperature that does not exceed 120 degrees F. and be emptied, sanitized, and refilled with fresh water daily.

Introduction of Solid Foods to Infants

GeoKids staff will serve commercially packaged baby food from a dish, not directly from the original jar. They will serve solid food by spoon only. They will discard uneaten food in dishes from which they have fed a child. Food will not be shared among children using the same dish or spoon. Unused portions in opened baby food containers (jars or home-prepared) must be stored in the refrigerator and discarded if not consumed after 24 hours of storage; we ask that you take opened containers of baby food home with you at the end of each day. Solid food will not be fed in a bottle or in an infant feeder unless we have specific written instructions from a health professional.

Progression of Experiences with Food Textures

For infants, foods are age and developmentally appropriate, progressing from pureed to ground to finely mashed to finely chopped as the infant develops. When children are ready for chopped foods, these foods must be cut into small pieces at home.

Location Of The Adult Supervising Children While Eating

Children in mid-infancy who are learning to feed themselves are supervised by an adult seated within arm's reach of them while eating. Children over 12 months of age who can feed themselves are supervised by an adult who is seated at the same table. A supervising adult should watch for problems that can occur when children in mid-infancy begin to feed themselves (for example "squirreling" of several pieces of food in the mouth).

MEAL TIME FOR OLDER INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Meal And Snack Patterns

There are two snack times and lunchtime every day. GeoKids provides snacks, while each family provides lunch for their child. GeoKids makes every effort to provide your child with wholesome, low sugar foods and to introduce your child to a variety of food tastes and textures at snack time. Snack foods include cereals, whole grain crackers and breads, fruits, vegetables, yogurt, cheese and milk. Snack menus are posted inside the classroom in the kitchen area. GeoKids advocates an "open" snack policy, where children are free to decide if they want to have snack.

Toddler's lunches should consist of items that your child will find palatable at room temperature; staff will not heat up lunches.

Eating with friends is an important part of each child's social development, however we do not permit sharing of food. Children wash their hands before and after eating.

The following foods are choking hazards for children under the age of 4:

Raw carrots (in rounds)	Whole grapes or cherry tomatoes
Marshmallows	Hot dogs (whole or rounds)
Large pieces of meat	Popcorn
Meat with bones	Hard candy
Fish with bones	Chewing gum
Chunks of hard vegetables	

Some foods can be altered to make them safe:

- Hot dogs: cut in quarters lengthwise, then into small pieces
- Whole grapes, strawberries, cherry tomatoes: cut in half lengthwise (in quarters if very large)
- Raw carrots: chop finely, or cut into thin sticks, or partially cook
- Large pieces of meat or hard vegetables: cut into pieces smaller than ½"
- Cheese should be cut into pieces smaller than ½"

For the youngest children:

- Pull string cheese into strings or cut into pea-size chunks
- Cut very large blueberries in half
- Do not send chips or pretzels if your child is not able to chew them properly

Encouraging Self-Feeding By Toddlers

GeoKids staff will encourage toddlers to hold and drink from a cup, to use a spoon, and to use their fingers for self-feeding. As children enter into toddlerhood, they are interested in doing things for themselves. Self-feeding appropriately separates the responsibilities of adults and children. The adult is responsible for providing nutritious food, and the child for deciding how much of it to eat. To allow for the proper development of motor skills and eating habits, children need to be allowed to practice learning to feed themselves.

Prohibited Uses Of Food

GeoKids staff will encourage, but not force, children to eat. GeoKids staff will not use food as a reward or punishment. Children who are forced to eat or for whom adults use food to modify behavior come to view eating as a tug-of-war and are more likely to develop lasting food dislikes and unhealthy eating behaviors. Offering food as a reward or punishment places undue importance on food and may have negative effects that may lead to obesity or poor eating habits.

SLEEPING

Infants nap according to their own schedules. If an infant should fall asleep while being rocked, lightly bounced, or taken for a walk in a stroller, he/she will be put in their cribs to continue their sleep. Note that it may take some time for sleeping habits to adjust to a new situation. The

teachers use many of the techniques used at home, including rocking, swaddling and patting, to help your child sleep, and we will work closely with you to establish good sleep habits for your child. As your child grows and matures, mat sleeping will be introduced.

Safe Sleeping Practices

Infants will be placed on their back for sleep. If you would like your child to be placed in another position, you must sign a release for us to do so. The infants are provided with a firm, tight-fitting mattress in a crib that meets current safety standards. Sides of cribs are checked when children are placed in them to sleep, to ensure that the sides are fully up and locked. There will be no pillows, quilts, bumpers, comforters, sheepskins, stuffed toys, or other fluffy items in the crib. Two children never share a crib at the same time. These practices are supported by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

While infants and toddlers are sleeping, a staff member is positioned in such a way that they can see and hear all children at all times. Sound monitors are not used in lieu of direct supervision.

GeoKids provides a clean fitted crib-sized sheet and blanket each day for infants; for infants under 12 months in a crib the blanket will only be used if tucked in firmly around the sides of the crib. In the Onyx Room parents provide a sheet, blanket and small pillow (if used) which are sent home each week for laundering. If your toddler has a special “lovey” to sleep with, like a small stuffed animal or blanket, please label it and send it with your child to use.

We understand that practices may be different at home and that some children have unique situations (e.g. – twins may sleep together in the same crib). However, we must follow licensing guidelines and adhere to the above stated policies. Licensing does not permit us to purposefully wake a sleeping child.

DIAPERING

Parents supply disposable diapers for their child; GeoKids supplies wipes. We cannot allow cloth diapers for sanitation reasons. You must supply your own diaper cream: please label it with your child’s name. If a prescription ointment is to be applied, a Medication Permission Form must be completed and signed by the parent; the ointment should be labeled with the child’s name and will be kept locked.

We have a diapering procedure that we follow in order to maintain a healthy, sanitary environment for all. It is essential that all adults follow this procedure with every diaper change to minimize the chances of contamination and illness. A teacher can demonstrate the procedure for you; it is also posted on the wall in the diapering area, and is appended to this handbook.

Gloves are to be worn with every diaper change, including your own child. Adults and children (even infants!) wash hands after every diaper change. Diapers are checked every two hours, but are changed immediately in the case of a bowel movement. **Note:** Due to state licensing requirements, parents are only allowed to diaper their *own* children.

Stand-Up Diapering

When young toddlers in the Moonstone Room are able to stand steady on their feet we introduce stand-up diapering. In this way children are enabled to participate more in the process and become more aware of their bodies. Teachers will demonstrate the procedure to you; it is also appended to this handbook. Although it may seem awkward to you at first, we find that it often helps to make the transition to toileting more natural

ILLNESS

In the Infant and Toddler Program, the most frequent occurrences which require that your child be taken home are:

- A temperature of 101 or higher, as measured with a temporal scan thermometer. Child must be fever-free for 24 hours before returning.
- Diarrhea -- runny, watery or bloody stools. Infants usually will be sent home on the second occurrence, toddlers and preschoolers on the first occurrence. The child must have one normal bowel movement before returning.
- Unidentified rash on any part of the body. Rash must be diagnosed by a doctor, with a note if the doctor determines that the rash is not contagious.
- Conjunctivitis. Child must be on antibiotics and free of discharge for 24 hours before returning.
- Vomiting (other than typical infant spit-up) within the past 24 hours.
- Continuous crying, or needing to be held by an adult constantly.

If your child exhibits one of these symptoms, you will be contacted by phone and a teacher will take your child out of the room to wait for you. We ask that you pick up your child as soon as possible so that the teacher may return to the room. When your child contracts a serious contagious illness, please let us know so that we can post a notice for other parents. This is a licensing requirement.

Please refer to GeoKids Health Policy (in the Parent Handbook) for a detailed outline of health and illness issues.

SUPPORTING INFANTS' PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Infants undergo enormous development in physical strength, size, coordination and ability in the first two years of life. While there are milestones in physical development, each child's developmental path is individual and progressive. Each step is important in itself and as the prerequisite for the next step: each development leads to the next development. Furthermore, physical development proceeds from the head down and from the inside (core) to the outside (outer limbs): for example, an infant learns to lift its head before turning its body over, to wave its arm before grabbing at a mobile, and to pull itself up to standing before walking.

Physical development is also tied to cognitive and emotional development: the attachment to a parent may induce a child to reach out; the desire for a toy just out of reach may provide the impetus for crawling.; curiosity about the contents of a box may compel a child to work on the small motor skills needed to open it.

The role of the adult with regard to the infant's physical development is to respond to his need for security and trust while providing an environment that affords both the space and motivation to develop physical skills in a natural way at the child's own pace.

With this in mind, GeoKids has developed a policy for the manner in which adults will support infants' physical development. We base our policy largely on the work of Magda Gerber (R.I.E. method); most infant specialists, including T. Berry Brazelton, Janet Gonzales-Mena and others, also endorse this approach.

1. **We do not put infants in positions that they are not able to attain on their own.** For example, we will not sit a child up if the child is not able to rise to a sitting position on his own. It is by repeated attempts to attain a position, whether it is sitting, rolling over or standing, that the child develops the muscles, balance and physical abilities to remain in that position safely. A child who has learned to pull himself up to stand while holding a table edge will have developed the strength necessary to be able to sit down safely, rather than fall; if an adult stands him and places his hands on the table, or helps him climb up on something, he will not know how to get down.

We also believe that this has implications for the infant's sense of security and competence: by putting him in to unattainable positions, we rob him of both.

2. **We do not try to advance a child beyond his/her capacity.** We do not try to push a child's development simply to achieve the next milestone. When children are free to move, they move in their own time and in their own way. Infants instinctually know how to move in the way that is safest for them. When the child is ready to do the next thing, he will do it. It is our responsibility to provide an environment in which materials are carefully chosen and positioned to engage the child's curiosity and interest, which in turn will motivate his development.
3. **We never prop up a bottle for the child to drink.** We hold the child and the bottle to feed him. However, if a child is able to hold the bottle by himself, we will hold him as he does so, or allow him to sit/recline on pillows while he drinks his bottle/cup by himself.
4. **We do not, generally speaking, "walk" a child around the room holding his two hands,** unless he is able to cruise holding on to furniture on his own; in that case we are not helping the child to do something he can't do on his own, but rather helping him to do it in more and different circumstances. Also, when a child is making the transition from cruising to walking, we might hold out a hand for him to grab on to when moving away from the table or other support.
5. **A note on "Boppy" Pillows:** In general, we prefer that infants lie flat on their backs or stomachs, as this is how they will learn to lift the head, roll over, etc. However, a Boppy may be used in some cases, such as to help support a child at an incline that is holding his

own bottle to drink, or to provide support to a child that has learned to sit up but is not yet entirely secure (to prevent injuries from falling back). A Boppy should not be used to “park” a non-mobile baby: although this may seem like a way to let the child see what is going on around him, at the same time it is placing him in a position in which he is unable to move freely.

Exceptions to these policies: There may be cases in which teachers may make exceptions to these policies for a particular child. Exceptions and reasons for them are to be documented on the child’s Needs and Services Plan in consultation with the child’s parents.

Written in consultation with Janesta Noland, MD

OTHER POINTS

Pacifiers

If your child uses a pacifier, please provide a labeled one. Children in the Moonstone Room who use pacifiers will be given them on an as-needed basis. Children in the Onyx Room who use them will typically have a pacifier only at naptime (exceptions may be made when an upset child cannot be comforted in ways, or in other special cases.) We generally don’t allow toddlers to walk around the classroom with a pacifier for the following reasons: health risks of using a pacifier that has been dropped on the floor; health risks of one child putting another child’s pacifier in their mouth; difficulty understanding a child who is trying to talk with a pacifier; and the need for speech muscles to learn how to work without a pacifier. The needs of a particular child might take precedence over this general policy.

Clothing/Seasonal Items

Active and sometimes messy play is going to be a part of your child’s day. We ask that children wear comfortable, washable play clothes that are easy to move around in and okay to spill and get paint on! Please don’t dress your child in clothes that will limit his/her exploration and full participation.

Children in diapers must be dressed in clothing and not just wearing a diaper or onesie, due to possible diaper leaks. Toddlers that are toilet-trained might be dressed in underwear only on hot days during water play. Children are allowed to take off their shoes except in wet or cold weather, or when riding bikes.

Parents are asked to bring a complete change of labeled clothing, including socks, shirts, pants, shorts, etc. to be left at school, as well as a light sweater or sweatshirt in your child’s cubby. We play outside even when weather is wet, so bring rain boots and a rain jacket for your child. We recommend that you provide a sunhat for your child.

Transitions

Sometimes a child has a hard time transitioning into GeoKids, or separating from parents in the morning. We work with families to ease this adjustment, and although it can be a stressful time, it usually passes quickly. A special comfort item can help a child transition into childcare, and we certainly welcome this. A small photo book with pictures of family, friends, pets, etc. can also be very helpful, providing a welcome point of contact and conversation for teachers to share with the child as they look at the pictures together.

Sunscreen

We provide a non-irritating sunscreen with SPF factor 30 or higher. If you want us to use a different sunscreen on your child, you may bring it in and label it with your child's name. It is helpful to teachers if you apply sunscreen to your child upon arrival. We will apply sunscreen to children before going outside and reapply in the afternoon and after water play. We will not apply sunscreen to infants under 6 months.

Bouncy Seats and Car Seats

We do not use bouncy seats. A sleeping child who arrives in a car seat or carrier may not be left in it to sleep; we must transfer the child to a crib or mat.

PARENT CONCERNS

At GeoKids we are a community of children, parents and staff all interacting and sharing our lives together. We recognize that parenting is one of the most difficult and rewarding experiences in your life. We also recognize that you are your child's first and most influential teacher. It is our goal to offer your family the best child care services possible and to merit the trust that you place in us when you bring your child here.

In our community, people work closely together in the classroom and interactions are generally positive, helpful, kind and understanding. Yet from time to time miscommunications or concerns may arise. When they do, we want you to tell us. Together, we will resolve the situation.

When you have a concern, please remember:

- Teachers want parents to feel very satisfied with the care their child is receiving.
- Bring any concerns to the teachers' attention. Teachers prefer that you talk with them directly, but they do understand if you would prefer to talk with the director. The Director will investigate and talk with teachers about your concern. We like to deal with issues in a straightforward manner so that they can be resolved.
- Don't allow concerns to build up; share them as they occur. Develop a habit of daily dialogue with the teachers. Although many concerns are best discussed outside the classroom, this does not preclude you from asking questions about issues/practices that you don't understand in the classroom.
- Let teachers know what things you think are going well.
- Sometimes we cannot make changes you may request due to other restrictions. These restrictions may include legal operating requirements, physical space, or the needs of the larger group or GeoKids as a whole.
- We want to hear your suggestions. We consider them seriously, and will always respond to them in a timely manner.

Change occurs at a rapid pace for young children, and as a result some concerns associated with a particular developmental stage of your child may resolve in time as he/she moves on to the next stage.